

LEADER

SAVING LIVES

Better now
than sorry

Fire and Rescue Department wants developers to install fire extinguishers in every home built after 2012

THE fire alarm has been set off, and it is ringing in nationwide attention. Hot on the heels of the tragic death of 23 people in the fire at the Darul Quran Ittifaqiyah religious school, the Fire and Rescue Department (FRD) is pushing for the amendment of the Fire Services Act 1988 (FSA) to make it mandatory for property developers to install firefighting equipment, such as fire extinguishers and smoke detectors, if the buildings are of a certain height. This is a move in the right direction. Adopting fire safety measures that include prevention, early detection and control will go a long way in preventing loss. Fire in any premises is a major concern, especially when it is accompanied by smoke in enclosed buildings.

Fighting fires is after the fact. It is a belated move at best. Prevention is better than cure, even in fighting fires. Just consider the scale of loss in the last three years. The country lost more than 330 lives and RM9.3 billion to fire. And, only 45 per cent of the time do fire engines reach the scene of the blaze under 10 minutes after receiving the distress call. With only 284 fire stations nationwide, the FRD can only do so much.

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Malaysians must help themselves, too. According to City Fire and Rescue Department chief Khirudin Drahman, most major fires are a result of people being unaware and unable to prevent them at the initial stage. The time is now for all of us to endeavour to become first responders.

But, here is where the problem starts. Many of us have an attitude problem. Like in many things, we do not pay much attention to fire safety, notwithstanding the fact that our lives and those of our loved ones are at stake. We would rather leave it to the FRD to put out the fire. This lackadaisical attitude is displayed by some of our corporate leaders, too. We so frequently hear of senior management of companies in high-rise buildings continuing their meetings while a fire drill is in progress. In fact, they issue instructions to the facility management department to inform them in advance of any fire drill so that they can be exempted. This sends out a wrong signal about fire safety to the workforce. Some Malaysians, for some strange reason, like to play the fiddle while Rome burns.

This unwelcome attitude must stop. And, it must stop now. We can only reach high altitude in fire safety if we change our attitude. The FRD statistics are enough to snap us out of our deep slumber.

As a first step, let us go out and get the fire extinguishers. While we are at it, let us also get some training on how to use the equipment. The FRD is only too willing to help. To make effective use of the limited resources of the FRD, we can marshal ourselves as a community for the training. It is time we answered FRD's aged call for one house to have one fireman.

FIRE EXTINGUISHER

DEVELOPERS MUST
FOLLOW BYLAW

They risk projects being declared 'unsafe for occupancy' if provision is not met

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HOUSING developers in states that have gazetted the Uniform Building By-Laws (UBBL) will risk having their projects declared "unsafe for occupancy" if they fail to provide every unit with a fire extinguisher.

Fire and Rescue Department deputy director-general Datuk Soiman Jahid said this was because the department would declare developers as having failed to comply with its "recommendation for building safety" if they failed to do so.

He said for states that had gazetted the law, providing a fire extinguisher in every house was a requirement before the Certificate of Completion and Compliance (CCC) could be obtained.

"It is an offence not to have one. When a state gazettes the UBBL, a clause on the need to provide a fire extinguisher would be included in the sale and purchase agreement, meaning developers who fail to comply can be sued for breach of agreement.

"We would also recommend to the Board of Architects against approving the CCC," he told the *New Straits Times*.

The Board of Architects, he said, would be held responsible if it approved the CCC for projects that failed to adhere to the law.

"The CCC is approved by the Board of Architects, so if they feel that it is safe to approve the application by developers who fail to provide the fire extinguisher, then they will be held responsible if anything were to happen.

"If we find that the board had approved it despite the building being exposed to fire hazards, we can sue the board if a fire breaks out."

Yesterday, Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government



The front page report in the 'New Straits Times' yesterday.

Minister Tan Sri Noh Omar said homeowners in states where the law had been gazetted could soon expect Fire and Rescue Department personnel to knock on their doors.

He said inspections would be done to ensure that everyone, including housing developers, complied with the requirement spelt out under the UBBL, which was amended in 2012, and gazetted by Sabah, Selangor, Terengganu and Penang.

It was reported yesterday that every home may be required to be equipped with a fire extinguisher in the near future as the department is drawing up papers to park it under a federal law or formulate a new one for the purpose.

It is understood that it could likely be made part of the Fire Safety Act 1988.

Under the UBBL, residential buildings (whose plans were approved from 2012) and exceed 30 metres, or 10 floors, must be equipped with a fire detector, apart from other fire fighting equipment, like wet-riser and dry-riser.

Noh said although the four states had gazetted the law, it was not fully enforced.

"Every house should be equipped with a fire extinguisher and people must take precautions to face the eventuality of a fire."

Fire and Rescue Department director-general Datuk Wan Mohd Nor Ibrahim had said local councils, as the authority that approves building plans, would

need to work with the department in enforcing the law on fire extinguishers.

"The fire department does not have the manpower to conduct door-to-door inspections on residences and it needs to work with local authorities."

The Penang Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) said they had no immediate plans to give out fire extinguishers to house buyers for its members' past projects, saying that the item was not part of their building cost.

Its chairman, Datuk Toh Chin Leong, however, said a meeting would be held soon to discuss it.

"As I understand, developers do not provide fire extinguishers in residential houses since it is not required and enforced by the fire department.

"This is despite the rules being mentioned in the bylaw... and the projects have already been given the Certificate of Completion and Compliance," he said, adding that it was unfair for developers to return to their past projects just to provide fire extinguishers.

Toh said the cost of providing fire extinguishers was not part of developers' building cost, but it would be included in future projects if the law was enforced.

It was reported that once the law was passed, those who purchased houses from 2012 could ask for a fire extinguisher from their housing developers. Those who purchased their units before that would need to buy it themselves. **Additional reporting by Julia Fiona**